

AN

ILLUSTRATION

OF

AGUR'S PRAYER.

PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

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The following Discourse was found among the papers of an amiable Christian lately deceased. It does not seem to have been intended by the author for publication. But as it relates to a subject of great importance, and is written with much Christian simplicity, it is hoped its circulation will not be unseasonable.

A G U R ' s P R A Y E R

ILLUSTRATED.

PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

Give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

THESSE words contain a part of Agur's prayer, one of those holy men, who "of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." They are well suited to express the desires of Christ's disciples living under the influence of the gospel. In this view I mean to attempt an illustration of them.

It will be necessary here to premise, that we do not understand this prayer against poverty and riches in an absolute sense; for *many* of Christ's people are poor, *some* of them are rich: they are placed in these different situations, according to the sovereign will of God, and there are rules given by God, to regulate their conduct in them. To be in either situation, therefore, is not unlawful in itself: but each has its peculiar temptations, from which a state of mediocrity is free.

An humble disciple, conscious of his own weakness, and of the power of temptation, is led to offer this petition, "Give me neither poverty nor riches."

What are we to understand by riches? This needs little explanation. We commonly consider that man to be rich, who possesses a considerable or large portion of world-

ly wealth. But perhaps, according to the petition in our text, we should consider him also to be rich, whose income affords support to himself, and those who immediately depend upon him; with a considerable or large overplus. For although he may not possess large property, yet his circumstances enable him to perform the duties of those who do, and he is in danger from all their temptations mentioned in the text. "He may be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, and thus lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come." Or, "being full, he may deny God, and say, who is the Lord?"

The opposite of the situation of the rich, is a state of poverty. When a man cannot always, or at most, with extreme difficulty, obtain the bare necessities of life, but cannot taste its comforts; is deprived at times of food and raiment, and in his best days, enjoys but a scanty portion of these; this surely is a poor man. Between a state of riches and poverty, is that one, in which we are fed with food convenient for us. In this state a man enjoys not only the necessities, but also the comforts of life; but his circumstances forbid him to indulge in its luxuries. It will occur to every one, that we use the expression *comforts of life*, in a comparative sense; because, what is comfort to one man, is not so to another. This arises from difference of constitution and education, and from many other circumstances, which it is not necessary here minutely to describe: but in the midst of all this variety, good sense, with a conscience under due subjection to the gospel, will, with considerable accuracy, distinguish between comforts and luxuries, between moderation and extravagance.

Men understand in general this in the case of others, though self-partiality blinds them in their own; a man, who fears not God, will therefore call every luxury, he wishes to indulge in, by the soft name of comfort: and we are afraid, that in an age, marked by extravagance and dissipation, Christians themselves are in part infected with the evil, and in great danger of swelling their list of comforts, and of introducing luxuries among the number. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." Of this, my brethren, we ought to beware, and

should, by our exemplary moderation, make it manifest that we live persuaded "that the Lord is at hand."

But let us, First, Consider the temptations of the rich. *Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?"*

1st, Riches tempt us to forget, or to deny our dependence upon God.

That we live, move, and have our being from God, is acknowledged, almost, by all men, in words; yet the influence of this truth seems to be felt by few. Those who fear not God, know nothing of it. Christ's people themselves live too little under this habitual persuasion; and the possession of wealth has a most powerful tendency to wear off the impression.

As God confers the things of this world through certain channels, when we receive in plenty, we are ready to look no farther than these, and to forget God, the giver of all: Hence was Israel of old exhorted, "When thou shalt have eaten and art full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord." And "beware lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied: then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God." So necessary was this caution, and so certainly do riches tempt to self-dependence, that it is recorded of the same people, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxed fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." The apostle calls this "trusting in uncertain riches, and not in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." This was the language of him, whose fields brought forth plentifully, saying to his soul, "Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." His want of dependence upon God, prevented him from laying up treasure in heaven by giving to the poor, and his confidence in riches, set his heart at ease, when he had enlarged his barns, and there secured his wealth. So nearly allied is the possession of riches, and confidence in them.

A Christian having learned this from the word of God, and experiencing the deceitfulness of his own heart, will be led to pray, "Lead me not into temptation; give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?" Not only do riches tempt us to deny our dependence upon God, but,

2dly, To deny that we are accountable to him, so that he can strip us of all our wealth in a day, as he did Job. What he confers he gives in trust. Christ's people are all stewards for God; and he will call the servants to an account, to whom he commits talents. They to whom riches are committed, are by the charge strongly tempted to think themselves lords. They see many of their fellow mortals depend upon them, and ready to run at their call; hence the danger of forgetting, that they too have a master in heaven, and of asking the independent question, "Who is Lord over us?" They are tempted to consider the wealth with which they are entrusted as their own property, which they may use according to their own pleasure, forgetting that in a night their souls may be required of them, and they called to give an account of their stewardship.

An humble disciple, who knows how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, how difficult it is to be faithful in the unrighteous mammon, and the awful punishment that awaits the wicked and unprofitable servant, joins Agur in this prayer, "Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?"

3dly, Riches tempt to forget, or practically to deny God, as the only all-sufficient portion.

Man naturally loves the world. The enjoyment of it is suited to his present state, and is, to a certain degree, lawful. But his native depravity leads him beyond the moderate bounds prescribed by God. Formed with desires for happiness, he seeks this in the objects which present themselves, and which he thinks within his reach: "he looks at things seen and temporal;" and while he continues ignorant of the gospel, he knows nothing better.

The knowledge and belief of this gospel, introduces him to a new source of happiness, even the enjoyment of God

himself, the fountain of all blessedness, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift. This happiness consists chiefly in a sense of the remission of sins, and a conscious interest in the divine favour. "Blessed (says the psalmist) is the man whose iniquities are pardoned and whose sins are covered." It consists also in a title to, and in the hope of the eternal inheritance. "Blessed (says Peter) be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, (by the resurrection of Christ from the dead), to an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away, in which we greatly rejoice." This comfort we have by the Spirit, as the earnest of it. "Having believed, says Paul, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the inheritance." The gospel gives also such a display of the glory of the divine perfections, as confers happiness, far surpassing not only that which arises from worldly enjoyment, but also that which is felt, from the contemplation of all the other works and ways of God.

But while in this world, even Christ's people have a great part of their corrupted constitution remaining, which strongly inclines them to this earth as a portion; and the possession of riches puts the indulgence of worldly lusts in their power. The enjoyment of God and of the world as a conjunct portion is impossible; for, in proportion as we "love the one we will hate the other." God must reign supreme in our hearts, and will admit no rival. "If any man therefore love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." John explains what he means by the world. "All that is in the world, says he, is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." Riches tempt us to indulge in one or other of these; either in the lust of the flesh, which consists in gluttony, drunkenness, uncleanness, and the incitements to these, in which may be comprehended the whole round of fashionable amusements; or in the lust of the eye, which is covetousness, and which is indulged by laying up treasures for ourselves on earth, &c. This last we learn from the parable of the rich man, whose fields brought forth plentifully; for this was spoken on purpose

against covetousness. Riches also tempt us to indulge in the pride of life, which consists in magnificent houses, and furniture, gay and costly dress, elegant and luxurious entertainments, and the various ways in which men pursue worldly honour. If the pride of life consists not in these things, and such like, it will be difficult to affix a determinate meaning to the expression. In these leading worldly lusts, rich men in general indulge themselves; and the possession of riches tempts Christ's disciples to join them. But he whose heart is tender, who hath tasted that the Lord is gracious, who relishes the sweetness of divine comfort, who knows how ready he is to be allured by worldly enjoyment, and how commonly the word is choaked by the deceitfulness of riches, the love of pleasure, and of other things; he in short who believes that "one thing is needful," joins Agur in his prayer, "Give me not riches, lest I be full and deny thee," *i. e.* as the portion of my soul, saying, "who is the Lord?"

4thly, To be full so as to deny God, seems also to include in it, an irreligious contempt of God. How hard is it for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God! How few rich men pay any attention to the religion of the New Testament! The character of rich men, in general, is given by James in these words, "Do they not blaspheme that holy name, whereby ye are called?" We frequently notice that the same men in poorer circumstances, make some profession of religion, but no sooner do they acquire riches, than they somehow seem to think, that irreligion and profaneness suit their circumstances; that it is the mark of a gentleman to blaspheme the name of God, and in their *fulnesse* do they proudly ask, "Who is the Lord?" So truly do rich men in general (though there are exceptions) verify the character given by James. 2d and 5th chapters.

5thly, There is nothing more unfriendly, to what we may call devotional affections, than worldly prosperity of every kind. No doubt, this is an abuse of divine goodness, but it is an abuse to which we are very prone. This is exemplified through the whole history of ancient Israel: when all went well, then they forgot God; when he afflicted them, then they cried unto him. The Lord

still, in love to his children, " scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," that they may be kept humble, and dependent, that they may feel their wants, and learn where to go for their supply.

Fulness tempts them to forget the way to the *throne of grace*, and leads in general to superficial devotion. Now, Christ's people who have their " fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ;" who cannot bear the thoughts of distant formal intercourse with God; who love his ordinances, because in them " he manifests himself to them, in another manner than to the world;" knowing that riches lead to a temper and conduct the opposite of this, and that the " grace of God teacheth to deny ungodliness," on this account join in this prayer, " Give me not riches, lest I deny thee," &c. Such are the temptations, to which the rich are exposed, as implied in the expressions in the text: but as these have immediate respect unto God; we may also add, as it is mentioned in other places of scripture,

6th, That riches tempt to the exercise of similar dispositions and conduct towards our fellow men. " Be not high minded," says Paul; " do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before their judgment seat?" says James. In society, we see daily this high mindedness expressed by the rich; in common style we call such men *purse-proud*: though the phrase be familiar, it is very expressive of that haughtiness of deportment, which is most commonly the effect of the possession of wealth. A rich man who fears not God is apt to despise the poor, and to oppress them. If any of Christ's people fall before this temptation, they then are ashamed of their poor brethren; they neglect them, they have no familiar intercourse with them, and they would blush before any of their rich neighbours, to own them as their companions, " the excellent of the earth, in whom they delight." This temper of mind would have led them to have treated Christ and his apostles, (had they lived in their days), in the same manner. *They* were poor men, and " accounted the filth of the earth, and the offscourings of all things." How difficult is it, for the most humble disciple who is rich, to escape from this evil disposition! It is then surely a prayer becoming all, whose consciences

are not "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,"
 "Give me not riches." Let us consider,

Secondly, The temptations of the poor, "Give me not poverty, lest I steal."

We steal when we take secretly any thing that is our neighbour's. This is the common idea affixed to stealing; but more seems to be here meant: besides this, certainly, it implies the using any unlawful means to supply our wants, or to free ourselves from straitened circumstances. Under this may be included overreaching in business, by taking undue advantage of others: saying when we buy "it is nought," and yet boasting when in possession; or when selling, charging more than the value of goods, presuming upon, or knowing the ignorance of the buyer. Under this too must be included, following an unlawful trade, for example, smuggling, or defrauding in any way the public revenue: many professors indeed think little of this guilt, and if not directly engaged in it themselves, think it no crime to encourage those who are; though Christ has expressly commanded, and given an example in his own practice, that we are to "render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's;" and his apostles under his direction command us to be "subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, and to pay custom to whom custom is due," &c.

Stealing further implies, contracting debts when we have no reasonable prospect of paying them, or not conscientiously discharging our debts when this is in our power.

The poor in general, fall very frequently, before these temptations, and Christ's people, when poor, are not ignorant of the force of them: it therefore well becomes them to pray, "Give me not poverty, lest I steal." But it is also here mentioned, that a state of poverty tempts to "taking the name of God in vain." This does not seem here only to mean cursing or swearing, or using the name of God in a light, irreverent or profane manner, though that be an usual vice of the rich, but it means also, 1st, Calling in question God's wise, and righteous disposal of events: as the Governor of the world. We are naturally excessive in our self-love, and

under the influence of this, we think that we cannot account for the divine conduct in the unequal distribution of the good things of this world. We forget that God is a sovereign, or at least, are disposed to imagine that his sovereignty should have a favourable direction towards ourselves. While we indulge such impious thoughts of God, no wonder that we also envy the prosperity of others, as was the case of the psalmist, see Psal. lxxiii. This fretful disposition towards the divine procedure, with its native expressions, is doubtless, "taking the name of God in vain," and a state of poverty leads to this. But this expression seems also to imply,

2d, The calling in question the divine faithfulness and love. These perfections are engaged in behalf of all God's people. He hath said, "He will never leave nor forsake them," and this is a reason given, why they should have their conversation without covetousness, and be content with such things as they have. Poverty tempts them to doubt this promise, and asks the question, how can these things be? Many do not call in question their faith in "God's not having spared his own Son for them," and yet doubt his faithfulness in giving them daily bread. This is a common deceit. Poverty tempts to it, and introduceth the sourness of discontent into the mind, which leads to sentiments like those of Job's wife, who advised him to curse God, and die. This surely is "taking the name of God in vain."

To one who hath been taught to call God *Father*, and at present lives, enjoying the light of his countenance, it is a dreary prospect to look at a state, which may tempt him to doubt of God's faithfulness and love, to think of him rather as an enemy, than as a friend: no wonder then that such are taught to pray, "Give me not poverty, lest I take the name of God in vain."

Thirdly, Let us view the happiness of a middle state.

1st, We have already said, that this state is free from the temptations, both of the rich and of the poor. In this then consists a very considerable part of the happiness attending it. When we know "that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he

possesseth ;" when we have learned from experience what an "evil thing and bitter it is to forsake the living God ;" so long as we cultivate a sense of our own weakness, will we prize a state which delivers from so much temptation to this. But

2dly, In a state of mediocrity, we enjoy the lawful happiness arising from the things of this world in the highest degree.

There is no doubt that the feelings natural to man, are of themselves innocent ; and there is a certain moderate indulgence of these allowed us by God. They become sinful only when indulged in excess, or when they move in a direction contrary to the divine will. The poor want the means of that earthly comfort which we may lawfully enjoy ; and the rich are in great danger of going too far in such indulgences. Now all excesses of this kind defeat their own end. Not only is satiety produced, but especially to a Christian, when he permits himself to go beyond moderate bounds, there is a sting left behind which occasions pain that effaces the memory of all he enjoyed.

When a Christian enjoys the comforts of life, sees all coming from God, "view this world so as not abusing it, knowing that the fashion of it passeth away ;" when, living as a pilgrim, he looks not up to the rich with envy, nor down upon the poor with scorn ; when he strives not to appear great in the world's eye, attempts not to obtain the gratification of his vanity by the shew of his table, or the richness of his dress, while he denies himself part of that comfort which he might otherwise lawfully enjoy, he is overpaid, in having feelings of a more refined nature gratified, when he gives himself to hospitality, is the friend of the stranger, the lover of the poor, especially of Christ's disciples ; in this kind of life, I conceive a man enjoys this world as he ought. What man of sense does not acknowledge, that we are most happy in partaking of worldly good in moderation ? and yet, who acts consistently with this sentiment, who has it in his power to do otherwise ? Fashion, like a torrent, carries all before it : alas ! that Christians should ever feel its influence, so as to conform to its extravagant maxims !

This moderation too does not subject us in this kind

of enjoyment, to the mortification of disappointed vanity, nor to the envy of our fellow men; evils which occasion no small uneasiness in the higher walks of life. A man therefore who can enjoy the lawful comforts of life, and whose circumstances exclude him from going beyond these moderate bounds, surely has such happiness, as this world affords, to greater advantage than either the rich or the poor.

We may barely mention, without entering into a particular illustration, that family happiness is to be found chiefly in this station.

3dly, This state is favourable to spiritual enjoyment; in which the happiness of a Christian chiefly consists. No doubt the Lord can preserve his people in any station, and communicate his consolations to them wherever he has placed them; and he does so to the poor and to the rich of his children, as well as to those in the state of which we now speak: But as a preference is given to this state in the text; the reason now assigned may be one cause of this. The apostle would have Christ's people without anxiety, 1 Cor. vii. 32. And Christ warns his disciples, as well against "the cares of this world, as against surfeiting and drunkenness; and no one that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life." This at least informs us, (though it may apply chiefly to teachers) that freedom from such entanglements, is a state best fitted for our pleasing him who hath called us to be soldiers. Now, the rich and poor have each a load of cares, though of different kinds: whatever other cares therefore a man in a middle state may have, he is free from those which attend both these states, and therefore may "wait upon the Lord without distraction." This is very conducive to spiritual enjoyment; for we cannot attend upon Christ, so as to have fellowship with him in his ordinances, when our minds are engrossed by other objects.

The objects that very frequently fix the attention of both rich and poor, are of a worldly nature. The poor man's situation requires so much care, to provide even the necessaries of life, that this has a tendency to absorb every other concern: The rich again have so much of this world, that a good deal of thought must necessarily be

employed respecting the disposal of them. And riches are so deceitful, and our hearts so naturally attached to this earth, that occupying the mind intensely about earthly things, even when it may be our duty, has a tendency to divert the channel of our affections from that course marked by God. All God's people without exception give a preference to spiritual enjoyment, above every other; therefore, says the psalmist, "When many say, who will shew us any good? Lord, lift upon me the light of thy countenance; this will put more joy into my heart than when corn, wine, and oil abound." This was the "one thing he desired, that he might dwell in the house of the Lord, and behold his beauty. He accounted one day in his courts better than a thousand," &c. A Christian therefore who from his situation in life, is led to consider, that he has no farther connection with the things of this world, than as they are necessary for his support on his journey heaven-wards, is surely in the best state for minding the things of the kingdom of God, and for cultivating intercourse with him, in whose presence he hopes to dwell for ever: And as we have seen, that a middle state is most favourable for that kind of enjoyment which is the proper happiness of a Christian, it is comparatively to be preferred to that of riches or poverty.

But all our desires ought to be expressed with submission to His will, who placeth his people in that state which pleaseth him, and calls them to attend to the duties of their various stations. We shall now therefore address a few exhortations to his people in each of those stations which we have been considering.

First, Exhortations to the rich.

In general, beware of falling before the temptations to which your situation exposes you. It is the danger arising from these that suggests the prayer, "Give me not riches."

You depend upon God, as well as the poorest of your brethren. "Be not therefore high minded: Trust not in deceitful riches, but in the living God." You must give an account; beware of forgetting this. Be faithful as the stewards of God. Lay not up treasures for yourselves on earth by hoarding your wealth. Jesus has pronoun-

ced him a fool who does so. Love not the world, neither the things of it; if ye do, the love of the Father is not in you. But more particularly,

1st, Be liberal, "sow bountifully, devise liberal things, be rich in good works, ready to distribute, lay up treasures in heaven, by giving to the poor, be careful to maintain good works, to do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Your situation exposes you to peculiar temptations, but it also calls you to eminent usefulness. The Lord, to whom "the earth belongs and the fulness thereof," "opens his hand and supplieth the wants of every living thing;" in doing this, he in his providence appoints some of his creatures as his stewards for others. This is the honourable situation which you fill. Distribute your Master's bounty agreeably to his nature and will with a liberal hand. He may call for his own at pleasure, and without your concurrence. So order it, that what you possess shall supply the wants of his needy creatures. He condescends to solicit for them, and promises to repay what he thus borroweth. "He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord, and he will repay it;" and can you refuse such a borrower? you are ill acquainted with his grace and faithfulness, if you hesitate. How strongly does Paul urge this duty from the example of Christ! "Ye know, says he, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." The apostles imitated him in this, "Not seeking their own profit, but the profit of many." And the first disciples were followers of them as they were of Christ. Thus are we informed of "the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Shall the practice of your rich neighbours be a snare to you? do you feel an inclination to imitate them? and shall not such illustrious examples move you?

Your own interest is concerned in the attention you pay to this exhortation. "As you now sow, so shall you

hereafter reap ; if bountifully, you shall reap bountifully, but if sparingly, you must also reap sparingly. " If you are unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, who shall commit to you the true riches ? If you are unfaithful in that which is another's, who shall commit to you that which is your own ? But if you are faithful, " God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and labour of love, which ye have shewed to his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints." You shall be rewarded with durable riches and honour at the coming of Jesus Christ.

By liberality also, you, in a great measure, free yourselves from the temptations of your circumstances ; for while you enjoy with gratitude the comforts of life, and distribute the overplus, you are not tempted to set your affections on the earth, because you lay up no treasure there for yourself : and faithfulness as stewards of that which is another's will prevent you from indulging in the " pride of life."

As we lay up treasure in heaven " by being rich in good works," your liberality will be subservient to heavenly-mindedness ; for riches thus used, instead of drawing your hearts to this earth will raise them to heaven. " Where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also."

There is no duty more insisted on throughout the New Testament ; and every disciple without exception is bound to pay strict attention to it, according as the Lord hath prospered him ; but as the rich chiefly have this in their power, and as the Lord conferred their wealth upon them for this end, they, in particular, receive it in charge. " Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

2d, Be temperate in all things. A poor Christian has little temptation to the contrary ; and the most wealthy should remember, that " they are pilgrims and strangers on this earth." Their conduct, rather than their word, should inform the world, that they are not ashamed of this character. They should dare to be singular, in conformity to Christ. In an age and place remarkable for

fobriety, Christian moderation may be little distinguished. But where extravagance and folly abound, there self-denial is noticed; there Christians are in the greatest danger: but, there too, every Christian in his place, *especially the rich*, can shew to men who fear God, by their non-conformity, "that they are not of this world."

In this luxurious age, mad with dissipation, when vain shew and the pride of life are carried to the highest lengths; when professors, almost of every name, throw off allegiance to Christ in this, and, instead of being dissimilar to the world, seem anxious to discover how nearly they may resemble it, and yet be esteemed Christians: in such an age, it becomes the real followers of Christ to stand forth, and to assert their freedom from this present evil world, from which they are redeemed, and to give evidence to all, that they are contented to be in the world as Christ was, and wish for no character more honourable than that given by himself to his first disciples, "they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." My brethren, *our* moderation should be visible to all; and in vain would we wish to be distinguished from the world in worship, while we fall in with their leading maxims and lusts: nonconformity to the world in these, is as characteristical of Christ's people as separation from a false or corrupted worship. Some may ask, Wherein consists this moderation? Common sense will dictate an answer. For it is not ignorance, but the want of inclination, that obstructs obedience to this precept. A humble Christian, who wishes only to know his duty that he may do it, has this plain rule to walk by, "*Avoid all appearance of evil.*" As the rich in particular have it in their power to make their moderation known to all, if you do not *thus* make it known, be assured you have transgressed. And every step you advance in conformity to the world, you draw back from Christ; for that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. "Be ye therefore sober. Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

3d, Exercise yourselves unto godliness: by which we mean, (though the expression may include more), that

spiritual intercourse we enjoy with God, in worship. This has a most powerful tendency to prevent highmindedness, and self dependence. In the sight of God, we feel ourselves poor, sinful mortals, on a level with the vilest, and saved by the same rich mercy. We feel that we depend upon him for all we enjoy, as well as the poorest of our brethren. Here too our attention is fixed upon the strength of those obligations, which bind us to live wholly to the Lord. By enjoying a sense of the divine favour, in this fellowship, we are taught to undervalue earthly abundance, and rather to fear the deceitfulness of riches, than to be proud of them. This intercourse with God should therefore be much cultivated by his people who are rich, as it is an antidote to the love of money, the root of all evil.

4th, Familiarize to your minds, the uncertain nature of every thing on earth, and the certainty of death, and judgment. Consider the account of these things in the word of God; and look around you, and you must see the scriptures verified. You must soon part with your riches, or they may take wings and flee away. The shortness of time, the uncertainty of riches, &c. are truths which force themselves into the minds of all, and often extort an acknowledgment on their side; but divine power alone can bring us under their influence. You, brethren, profess to have felt this power. Make this evident, by your victory over the world. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Live therefore, ready, whenever your Lord calls, to give an account of your stewardship.

Secondly, Exhortations to the poor.

1st, In general, be ye also aware of falling before the peculiar temptations of your circumstances. Poverty will not excuse fraud or injustice. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" It is not your temptations, but the word of God alone, which you must make the rule of your conduct. Envy not the wicked who increase in riches. They are set on slippery places, and shall have a certain downfall. Envy not your rich brethren. You are in great danger of this. How natural is it for you to imagine, that, were

you placed in their circumstances, how nobly would you act ! how generous, and yet how humble, how moderate and self-denied *you* would appear ! Alas ! ye know not yourselves ! Mens sentiments change with their circumstances, and experience has long justified the observation, that none are more liable to pride, vanity, ostentation, and extravagance, than those who have been raised from poverty to wealth. You feel your own temptations ; you are ignorant of those connected with riches. And were you fully aware of the danger that attends them, you would not envy the possessors.

Doubt not the providential care of your Father. The young lion, the raven, the sparrow, yea the grass of the field, share in this, and shall he not feed and cloath his own children ? When he promiseth never to leave nor forsake you, take courage ; be bold in saying. *I will not fear.* Cast all your care upon him ; he careth for you. "Be therefore anxious for nothing ; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God ; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

2d, Use lawful means to free yourselves from a state, which exposes you to so strong temptations. "Be not slothful in business." With quietness work and eat your own bread ; for so hath the Lord commanded, that if "any man will not work, neither should he eat." As this is the way the Lord hath appointed for the supply of your wants, you must not think you can be relieved from them, while you only lament your poverty, and indulge yourselves in sloth and idleness. It is indeed the duty of your brethren to supply you with necessaries, when Providence puts it out of your power, by honest industry, to support yourselves ; and it is your duty to make these wants known, and with humility and gratitude to receive their bounty : But every lawful exertion on your part should be made, that you may be able practically to remember that beautiful saying of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

3d, While it is the will of God to keep you in a state of poverty, be not discouraged. The Lord provides

comfort and support, under all its miseries. The Lord's people, in general, are a poor and afflicted people, who trust in his name. You have many partners in your sorrows; nothing has befallen you but what is common to your brethren in the world. Your Lord was poor and afflicted in this world. He chose this state, that he might know all the painful feelings, to which humanity is subjected. "He was made like unto his brethren in all things." He is merciful; he can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities; and his sympathy, his love, and his power are equally great. He will not "suffer you to be tried above what you are able to bear."

Though poor in this world, if you are rich in faith, you are "heirs of the kingdom." This hope should support you. Time is short, it passes swift as a weaver's shuttle; and the life of man is as an hand-breadth, your life and your sorrows shall end together. You are only pilgrims; care not for the ruggedness of the path, nor for the scanty, and coarse fare you may get by the way; you shall soon reach home, if you faint not; then shall you forget your poverty, you shall receive durable riches and honour; you shall receive your good things, and enjoy comfort, far surpassing your present misery; "you shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, the sun shall not light on you, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, shall lead you unto fountains of living waters; and God himself shall wipe away all tears from your eyes. The joy set before the prime Leader in the faith, made *him* endure the cross, and despise the shame. He now enjoys *his* hope; follow the Captain of salvation, and ye too shall be made more than conquerors, through him who hath loved you.

Thirdly, Exhortations to those in a middle state.

1st, Be content with and thankful for your lot. From what you have heard, you may see you have good cause. How forcibly does Paul exhort to this, 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content." You should be peculiarly thankful for freedom from the temptations both of the

rich and poor. So long as you are humble and self-dif-
fident, you will prize this.

2d, Beware of ambition and covetousness, on the one
hand, and of idleness and extravagance, on the other.
Nothing is more unfriendly to the influence of the truth
upon the heart, than an ambitious and aspiring spirit.
When the mind becomes enamoured with sensible ob-
jects, then the deceitfulness of riches choke the word.
Whenever a man forms the *wish to be rich*, to be con-
sistent, he should give up with the profession of Christ's
name; for he will most certainly dishonour it, and injure
his own soul. We have good authority for this assertion.
“They that *will be rich*, (says Paul), fall into tempta-
tion and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,
which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the
love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some
coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pier-
ced themselves through with many sorrows.” This is
God's account, who can neither deceive nor err. In such
wishes and pursuits, no doubt, many deceive themselves,
as well as others; imagining and professing, that their
grasping after wealth arises from a desire of being more
useful. But how often do we see the delusive nature,
and frequently the hypocrisy of such reasonings! We
may often observe men apparently humble, self-denied,
and spiritual in their conversation, when they enjoy food
and raiment with contentment, yet no sooner do ambi-
tious and gainful schemes take possession of their thoughts,
than the cares of this world, and the entanglements of
life, so occupy their attention, that they have neither
time nor inclination, to make “the one thing needful,”
the main object of their pursuit.

Brethren, “when we think we stand, let us take heed
lest we fall.” “Let us not be high-minded, but fear.”
Strong men have been overcome by the world; and what
person ever returned from the battle without wounds,
who dared to venture beyond, or to the utmost limits of
lawful ground? Young men are in peculiar danger from
this temptation; therefore doth Paul command Timothy
to exhort them “to be sober-minded.” Let Paul's rule
be strictly adhered to. “Having food and raiment, let
us therewith be content.” This of itself constitutes the

greatest happiness that is to be enjoyed from any state in this world, and without it, we will be miserable in the midst of plenty.

But idleness and extravagance, or even inattention to our worldly affairs, will, in time, subject us to all the temptations of the poor. "By idleness a man is brought to a piece of bread." If we, therefore, pray with Agur, "Give me not poverty," let us not contradict our petitions, by pursuing a line of conduct, which cannot fail, in its own nature, and by the will of God, to counteract them.

3d, Seeing your situation is so favourable, be singularly zealous in your profession, and exemplary in your lives. You have it in your power to be comparatively without carefulness, and may serve the Lord without distraction. Prize and improve your privilege, and adorn your profession. This is the proper return of gratitude to God for his kindness. Your freedom from the temptations of the rich and of the poor will aggravate your guilt, if you are found unfruitful. Mind, therefore, the kingdom of God chiefly, and all other things shall be added.

CONCLUSION.

These sentiments are too sober to be regarded by men enamoured with a hope in this world. Most professors will think them by far too strict; and even Christ's disciples, in their days of health and prosperity, may not relish them so highly as they ought. But when adversity and disease make us feel our close connection with death and judgment, I am persuaded, this conviction will force itself into our hearts, That such thoughts are not unsuitable for dying mortals, and that they are becoming such especially who profess themselves strangers and pilgrims upon earth. In the days of sorrow indeed, high and low, rich and poor, profane and decent, Christ's people and the world, all with one voice moralize upon *the vanity of the world*. Christ's real followers alone believe this uniformly; others talk of the unsatisfying nature of earthly good, when they can no longer enjoy it.

What we have said upon this subject, brethren, calls for our peculiar attention. We profess to regulate our conduct solely by the New Testament. Search then and see if that which you have now heard speak its genuine language. If it does, let us not *speculate* about these things; let them never be matters of controversy, but of practice. We can only appear to be Christ's "friends, by *doing* his will." A church of Christ should manifest his glory, by *conformity to him* who is their head; but whenever we court the friendship of the men of the world, by conformity to it; whenever we wish to attract their attention, by any means but the purity of our doctrine, and the holiness of our lives; then we begin to be weary of Christ's yoke, and to be ashamed of his name; and this, we are persuaded, will be the case whenever these rigid sentiments, (as many professors think them), are given up by us.

Let me, therefore, beseech you, by the tender mercies of God, by the second coming of our Lord, and by your gathering together to him, not to be conformed to this world. Keep your garments clean. Overcome the world by the faith of Jesus; "for ye are not of the world, even as he is not of the world."

Can we, brethren, conscientiously join Agur in his prayer? Who will not deprecate poverty! But how few, from the heart, put up this petition, "Give me not riches!" Surely we are in greater danger from riches than from poverty; what then is the cause of this difference? *Love*, too much *love* to the world, is the reason. Mortify what remains of this in you. Set your affections on things above; for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When he who is your life shall appear, ye shall also appear with him in glory! While you look for a heavenly country, God will not be ashamed to be called your God. When Christ comes, then is the time for Christians to appear in their truly honourable character. Now they must be in the world, as he was, but when he shall appear, they shall be like him in glory, and shall receive durable riches and dignity. If we rejoice in this hope, then will we, from the heart, join in this prayer, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be

full and deny thee, and say who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

CONTENTMENT.

My God and Father ever bless'd,
Enriching all, of all possess'd,
By whom the whole creation's fed;
Give me each day my daily bread.

To thee my very life I owe,
From thee do all my comforts flow;
And ev'ry blessing which I need,
Must from thy bounteous hand proceed.

Great things are not what I desire,
Nor dainty meat, nor rich attire;
Content with little would I be,
That little, Lord, must come from thee.

While wicked men, with all their store
Are ever grasping after more;
With Agur's wish I'm satisfy'd,
Nor grudge them all the world beside.

THE END.